

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. President, I also want to speak at length on a very important matter that I hope will also come to a vote on the floor of this Senate shortly; and that is the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. I am pleased this bill is moving through the committee process, and I commend Chairman ARLEN SPECTER, who is moving on yet another important piece of legislation this session.

The enactment of the Voting Rights Act was absolutely necessary 41 years ago and was initially passed during a very tumultuous time in our country's history. In fact, the Voting Rights Act should have been passed many years before then. But history has proven that the law was just and appropriate to provide equal opportunities and protections to persons with the desire to express themselves at the ballot box.

This is completely consistent with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. And I believe we are all better off for the choices that were made back 41 years ago. And that has strengthened the fabric of our country. It has helped make us a more perfect union, and made us stronger as a country as we face challenges presently.

The present legislation before us reauthorizes several key sections of the Voting Rights Act that will expire next year if no action is taken. The expiring parts are section 5, section 203, and sections 6 through 9.

This legislation helps ensure the fundamental right of all eligible citizens to vote. It sends a strong message that no matter what your race, religion, gender, or national origin, if you are a law-abiding citizen you have the right to vote. At the core of representative democracy is the participation of informed people. The people are the owners of this Government.

While the U.S. Constitution surely guarantees the right to vote, legislation was and is still necessary to ensure that in practice that guarantee is never diminished. My Commonwealth of Virginia has come a long way since this law was first enacted, and a reauthorization is necessary to ensure this progress continues throughout the United States, from Florida to New York to Alaska.

Now, some will argue that counties and cities and States cannot be removed from or "bail out" of the preclearance aspects of this if they so desire and have a good record on voting rights. Now, the facts are, though, that—and I am just speaking for the Commonwealth of Virginia—11 cities and counties in Virginia have been able to "bail out" of the Voting Rights Act by proving that "no [racial] test or device has been used within such State or political subdivision for the purpose or with the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color." The counties in Virginia that have been removed from preclearance review are—in alphabetical order—Au-

gusta, Frederick, Greene, Pulaski, Roanoke, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren, and the cities of Fairfax, Harrisonburg, and Winchester.

Renewal of the act does not mean that the reauthorizing States still engage in voter discrimination on the basis of race. Renewal should instead be viewed as a continued unflagging commitment to ensuring the protection of a law-abiding persons's right to vote without subversion or unwarranted interference.

The Voting Rights Act is a real and visible commitment made to ensure that voter discrimination will be stamped out and effectively prohibited if and when it does occur. Great strides have been made in ending voter discrimination in all of its forms since the Voting Rights Act was passed. It should also be noted that recognizing and addressing these problems is the appropriate prudent approach. It is responsible rather than ignoring those problems.

Thanks in part to the Voting Rights Act, Virginia was the first State in the Nation to popularly elect the first Governor who is an African American. I hope after this November's elections, Virginia is not still the only State with this record, and that there will be two States that have elected Governors who are African Americans.

Now, the election in Virginia, represented an inspirational success for a person, L. Douglas Wilder, who persevered and won that election. It was also an achievement for a State that only decades earlier had counties that closed their public schools rather than integrate them to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of education*.

My friend and colleague in the other body, Representative JOHN LEWIS, and I recently returned from a pilgrimage to Farmville, VA, as part of a group organized by the Faith and Politics Institute. During this pilgrimage, and previous pilgrimages I have taken to Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, AL, we heard first-hand stories from still-living civil rights leaders and also personal heartbreaking stories from people about the impediments faced by African Americans as they grew up with the racial discrimination that existed at that time.

Now, as we strive for a society where all people are judged by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin, we must join together in our great country of promise to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and to succeed. Reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act is a tool that has, can, and will help achieve this goal of fairness. I am committed and dedicated to ensuring that the voting rights of all law-abiding Americans are protected, and the Voting Rights Act has proven to be an able vessel for accomplishing this important objective.

I urge my colleagues to bring this important piece of legislation to the

Senate floor as soon as practicable this summer so we can debate the issues and amendments and ultimately renew the Voting Rights Act.

Mr. President, I wish my colleagues and all Americans a happy, safe, and patriotic Independence Day. With our friends and families, let's reflect on our foundational values that must be preserved. And a lot of these values need to be preserved from monarchical judges who prevent the pledge of allegiance in schools because of the words "under God," but, on the other hand, allow the desecration of the flag.

We have judges who redefine the institution of marriage, but allow local government officials, in a place like New London, CT, to act like lords—the reason we seceded from the monarchy—among those lords in New London, CT, to take people's homes—the American dream—using eminent domain, not because there was a public purpose of a school or a road to be built, but because they wanted to derive more tax revenue off of that property and that land.

As Senators, let us return to act to secure our borders, develop energy independence, confirm sound judges, and renew the Voting Rights Act to make sure this is a land of opportunity for all.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO DR. GENE SIMON

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a man for whom I have great respect: Dr. Gene Simon.

Tomorrow, June 30, Dr. Simon will retire after 31 years of exceptional service as chief executive officer of Chaddock, a nationally acclaimed, faith-based, child welfare agency in Quincy, IL.

In the New Testament, James, the disciple of Jesus, tells us, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Gene Simon has taken that Bible lesson to heart his whole life. He has taken action. For more than 30 years, he has provided a home and food and clothing for children who might otherwise have had nowhere to turn.

Chaddock serves more than 6,500 people a year—children and families. Many of the young people Chaddock helps are at-risk. Some have endured serious abuse or neglect. Chaddock provides outpatient and residential treatment and the help young people and their families need to heal.